

Testimony
Eric E. Holdeman, Director, King County Office of
Emergency Management
To
House of Representatives
Homeland Security Committee
Amending the Homeland Security Act of 2002

- Mr. Chairman and other members, for the record I am Eric Holdeman, Director for the King County Office of Emergency Management. A position that I've held for the past ten years. Prior to working for King County I worked for Washington State Emergency Management for five years in a variety of supervisory positions, that included disaster response operations, planning, training, exercises, and public education. Previous to this I completed a 20 year military career as an infantry officer. My experience in the military included four years working as Chief of Operations and Chief of Contingency Planning for the then Fourth U.S. Army. These duties included working on plans such as Continuity of Government (COOP) for the National Command Authorities, Military Support for Civil Defense and Military Support to Civil Authorities. This responsibility was for a seven state area in the Mid-west, and included extensive coordination with FEMA Region V, headquartered in Chicago.
- I would like to express my overall support for this bill. While there are many provisions in the legislation there are three that are critically important to improving our nation's collective ability to respond.
 - Combining, once again, the function of emergency preparedness with that of disaster response and recovery.
 - Establishing Homeland Security Regional Offices
 - Retaining the name of FEMA as defining the Federal emergency management agency for the nation.
- First of all there is the reuniting of emergency preparedness, with disaster response and recovery into the same organization.
- Disaster Preparedness is the foundation for disaster response. What you do to prepare for disasters by planning, training and exercising will set the tone for your capability to respond collectively when disasters do strike.

- We have seen what the impact was of taking disaster preparedness away from FEMA. While it was not made official until the Fall of 2005, in essence FEMA has not had the emergency preparedness function for the last five years. Having both functions placed under the control of the Under Secretary for Emergency Management will measurably strengthen our disaster response capabilities. This is one of those times where the placement of the agency on the organization chart does make a significant difference.
- Secondly, I have been saying for a long time that the one single step that the Federal government can do to quickly improve the nation's ability to respond to disasters is to establish Homeland Security Regional Offices. Without these offices there has been "No One, that is No One" to coordinate multiple Federal agency regional efforts in disaster preparedness, and no one in the regions of this nation to work with State Emergency Management Offices, or like in my case major metropolitan areas. Without FEMA Regional Offices being empowered to perform this function (FEMA Region X is only 20 miles from my office) our ability to interact with a coordinated Federal agency effort has been eliminated. This legislation fixes that issue and provides for regional offices dedicated to the effort of coordinating and facilitating our Federal, State and Local efforts in preparing for disasters, and providing for a more effective response when disasters do strike.
- And, retaining the name of FEMA. I recognize that there have been calls, most recently by the U.S. Senate, to do away with the FEMA name and establish a new organization to replace it. Well, there is no replacing the functions of FEMA, they must continue if we are to once again have an effective Federal disaster agency. If you recall years ago when the Chrysler Corporation had a problem and was on the financial ropes. Lee Iacocca did not come in and say we are going to fix the problem at Chrysler by changing our name. No, he fixed the problem by rolling out improved products in the form of better automobiles. We need to fix the FEMA product, not the FEMA name. If the FEMA name is done away with, we will end up like the entertainer Prince, who changed his name to a symbol. Everyone referred to him as "Formerly known as Prince." I can see that repeated in the future if we do away with the FEMA name. Whatever the new name is we'll end up saying, "You know, what use to be FEMA."
- Lastly, I call on my peers in State and Local Emergency Management Offices across this great land to get behind this bill. As I stated before, it is not perfect, but we need something now. Don't let an attempt at coming up with a perfect piece of legislation become the enemy of something good. Implementing this legislation will not change things over night. But, the sooner we reunite disaster preparedness and response, and establish Regional Homeland Security Offices, and decide to keep the FEMA name, the sooner we will be on a path to a more disaster resilient America.
- Thank you for this opportunity to testify, and I look forward to any questions that you might have.